Foreword

As a part of the Thames Gateway, one of Europe’s biggest regeneration initiatives, North Kent is a priority area for growth. Tremendous progress has been made over recent years - the transformation of Chatham Maritime and the dramatically improved transport links to London brought about by high-speed rail services from Ebbsfleet are just two examples. But there is much still to do.

This Growth Plan sets out the ambitions of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership to accelerate sustainable economic growth in North Kent; and outlines our strategy to help deliver these ambitions.

As a local business, we want you to be our partner in this process. Growth in North Kent can only come through the hard work of businesses like yours. It is the job of the public sector partners to understand your needs and challenges - and make the conditions as favourable as possible for your business to succeed.

“'It is up to us - public sector and private sector partners, working together - to chart a way forward and create the conditions for growth and prosperity.’”

We welcome your views - if you have any questions, or suggestions, please do get in touch.

Rob Bennett
Chair of Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
What is the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership?

The Thames Gateway Kent Partnership (TGKP) is a private and public sector partnership that helps deliver sustainable economic growth across North Kent.
The Partnership comprises senior representatives from across the North Kent business, local authority and higher/further education communities, the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA), the Environment Agency, and also includes a North Kent Member of Parliament.

Its main aims are:

• to create the best conditions possible to attract investment and deliver sustainable, private sector-led economic growth across North Kent;

• to promote and enable collaboration between private and public sectors to help achieve growth;

• to work with partners in London and South Essex, on pan-Gateway activities, to ensure that the views of North Kent businesses are represented and that the Thames Gateway remains a key priority for government.
Our vision

Our vision for North Kent was agreed by the Partnership on its formation in 2001 and remains as relevant today as it was then.
North Kent will be recognised as:

An area of exciting towns and cities complemented by an outstanding natural environment, providing an exemplar of urban regeneration.

A thriving business centre attracting leading investors and businesses through its diverse and skilled workforce, high-quality commercial sites and local services, and accessibility to transport links and strategic routes to UK and continental markets.

An area of strong, integrated communities with harmony between new and existing businesses and residents – where the benefits of development and investment are shared by the whole community.

A vibrant cultural hub with a thriving social scene and civic pride – attracting a growing student population, bringing youth and vigour to the community.

Making Thames Gateway Kent the place to be
Our economic objectives

To achieve our vision, the Partnership has set out 10 long-term economic objectives for North Kent.
1. **Raise Gross Value Added (GVA) productivity** per head in North Kent to that of the average for the greater south east of England.

2. Support the creation of at least **58,000 jobs** between 2006 and 2026, particularly in high-value sectors.

3. Attract and **grow the number of knowledge-based companies** in North Kent’s economy.

4. **Improve the skills** of North Kent’s workforce and tackle unemployment.

5. Increase the rate of **new business start-ups**.

6. Maximise the **economic benefits of our universities** by strengthening the links with industry and retaining more graduates in the area.

7. **Attract and retain investment** in our priority employment locations, ensuring the development of new employment sites and provision of high-quality, marketable business premises.

8. Continue to **lobby government** for the necessary investment in transport and infrastructure, to assist sustainable economic growth across North Kent.

9. Support the delivery of up to **52,000 new homes**, between 2006 and 2026.

10. Ensure that all new development is of the **highest possible quality**.
Achieving our economic objectives:

Attracting new businesses and helping existing businesses to grow and prosper in North Kent is crucial to the future growth of the Thames Gateway. Our priorities include:

1. Supporting key industry sectors

While supporting all sectors, the focus of activities will be on:

- **North Kent’s existing sector strengths** (e.g. ports and logistics, advanced manufacturing, and sustainable construction);
- **sectors where there are particular opportunities for growth** due to location advantages of North Kent (e.g. environmental technologies, business and financial services, creative industries, and tourism and leisure);
- **sectors where population growth will bring benefits** (e.g. public sector and higher education).

Local actions

- Develop and implement measures to **support the key growth industry sectors** in North Kent.
- **Maximise the opportunities for the environmental technologies sector** - building on proposals for wind turbine manufacture in Sheerness and training provision offered in North Kent.
- Develop and implement proposals for **effective engagement with businesses** in North Kent.
2. Increasing innovation, enterprise and creativity

Supporting businesses and helping them to exploit new ideas through innovation and creativity is critical for economic growth. This support can be optimised by:

- streamlining businesses’ access to financial support;
- fostering an entrepreneurial culture;
- strengthening links between the business community and higher education institutions to exploit and embed research, innovation and creativity.

Local actions

- Continue to strengthen and market the concept of the Kent Innovation Corridor, to maximise the benefit offered by the network of excellent new innovation centres across North and East Kent.
- Work with local universities and businesses to strengthen existing relationships and build new links.
3. Attracting and retaining investment

Our employment targets will not be delivered from growth in existing businesses alone. Attracting inward investment is key to achieving our ambitions for North Kent. Such investment will require:

- effective promotion of the Thames Gateway;
- access to high-quality employment and housing sites;
- the necessary infrastructure and transport routes to unlock key employment sites and markets.

Local actions

- **Work with partners** in Essex and London, through the Thames Gateway Strategic Group (TGSG), to promote and market the Thames Gateway.
- Work with the TGSG and Locate in Kent to promote and co-ordinate inward investment opportunities.
- Develop innovative mechanisms to fund infrastructure improvements, making use of new government incentives and support.
- Assist HCA in the stewardship arrangements for ex-SEEDA land and property assets – ensuring full coordination with investment priorities across North Kent.
4. Improving skills and employability

A skilled workforce is a key driver of productivity and competitiveness and is vital to achieve sustainable economic growth. The skills across North Kent’s workforce need to be optimised to ensure that employers remain competitive and local workers can successfully fill the newly created roles. The skills provision must:

- meet the skills needs of existing and future employers;
- improve skills and support skills progression for residents in work or education;
- reduce unemployment and economic inactivity through provision of training opportunities to residents.

Local actions

- Develop an effective means of engaging with local businesses on employment and skills needs.
- Develop a more integrated and effective employment and skills offer for North Kent residents and businesses.

Learning and Community Campus, The Bridge, Dartford
5. Enhancing connectivity

Enhancing connectivity is essential for sustainable economic growth. The free flow of goods, information, services and people can unlock key employment sites and markets. So investment in an area’s physical (i.e roads and rail) and digital infrastructure is essential.

North Kent benefits from a number of valuable transport assets – including Ebbsfleet International station and High Speed 1 services to North Kent stations, and its various seaports. So capitalising on these existing resources is vital to help attract high-value businesses to the area. Connectivity in North Kent can be improved further by:

- **strengthening the area’s transport links** across the south east, to London and the rest of the UK, and to Europe;
- **relieving congestion** on local routes;
- **investing in the area’s physical and digital infrastructure.**

### Local actions

- Work with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) to ensure that North Kent development sites benefit from government funding programmes such as the Growing Places Fund and the Regional Growth Fund.
- Ensure that Thames Gateway Kent’s needs for investment in transport infrastructure, to unlock jobs and homes, are reflected in the SELEP’s transport prioritisation exercise.
- Respond to the Government’s consultation on airport capacity.
- Ensure that the views of North Kent partners and businesses are taken into account in the appraisal of options for a future Lower Thames Crossing.
- Participate in the consultation on the new integrated rail franchise for Kent, in order to ensure the most economically advantageous service for North Kent.
- Respond to Kent County Council’s Make Kent Quicker campaign, ensuring that North Kent’s business and community needs for broadband investment are properly understood.
6. Improving quality of life

Improving the quality of life in North Kent is a key part of our vision. Creating high-quality buildings and enhancing the natural landscape is vital if we are to successfully attract new people to the area and improve the lives of existing residents.

Any investment therefore should:

- encourage **high-quality developments** in sustainable communities;
- provide **high-quality cultural facilities**, including theatres and museums;
- provide **high-quality public services**;
- ensure that development **enhances the quality of the natural environment**.

**Local actions**

- Ensure that development **reflects community needs** and complements the natural environment.
- **Support initiatives designed to enhance the natural environment**, such as those utilised within the Greater Thames Nature Improvement Area.
- Develop and support initiatives to **promote high-quality building design and public realm development**.
Achievements to date

The last twenty years have seen enormous change and much has already been achieved across North Kent.
Ebbsfleet International station opened in November 2007, with domestic high-speed rail services to North Kent stations commencing in December 2009. This high-speed link has brought journey times, from Ebbsfleet to central London, down to only 17 minutes, and those to Paris to just over two hours.

The first residents moved into their new homes at Springhead Park in Ebbsfleet Valley in June 2008, which heralded the start of the realisation of this world-class development.

The reinstatement of the rail freight link at Northfleet was completed in 2011/2012, being jointly funded by Crossrail, Network Rail and Lafarge at a total cost of around £13 million.

Chatham Maritime has been transformed from a defunct naval dockyard to a thriving business, education, leisure and residential community. It is now one of the top three business locations in Kent, with 120,000 m² of office space, providing over 3,500 jobs. It is home to a community of around 7,000 residents on St. Mary’s Island, in an award winning residential scheme.

Chatham Maritime is also home to the new campus of the Universities of Medway with around 10,000 students at the universities of Greenwich, Kent and Canterbury Christ Church, and MidKent College. The new North West Kent College campus at Gravesend; enhanced facilities at the Dartford campus; and SusCon, the new sustainable construction centre at The Bridge, Dartford, contribute further to the dramatic improvements elsewhere in North Kent.
A number of business parks have already been developed across North Kent, including Crossways bringing 6,500 jobs. Investments have also been made to Sittingbourne’s Kent Science Park, where additional commercial space is expected to bring another 400 jobs to the area by 2014; and to the Eurolink Business Park which provides 6000 jobs and has further future development potential.

A variety of new centres for innovative businesses have also emerged, including The Nucleus and The Base in Dartford, Innovation Centre Medway at Chatham and The Joiners Shop for creative industries in Chatham’s Historic Dockyard.

A number of major transport infrastructure improvements have been completed, contributing to a vast increase in the area’s transport capacity. These include: the Sheppey Crossing, which opened in July 2006; the development of the Dartford and Gravesham Fastrack rapid transit system; M2 and A2 improvements in Dartford and Gravesham; and the recently completed next phases of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief road and the Rushenden Relief road in Swale.

North Kent has seen major investment in its sports and leisure facilities, including: Dartford’s new Princes Park football stadium; the new Cyclo Park at Gravesend; and the introduction of an 800 hectare green space development around Cobham Park.

Although much has already been achieved, further investment is required if we are to achieve our vision for North Kent.
Attracting investment

Over recent years the UK has seen enormous economic change and North Kent is no exception. Along with the rest of the UK, North Kent has been affected by the slow down in the economy. However there have been a number of positives that point to a healthy future.

- Although there have been job losses in North Kent since 2007, many sectors of the economy have grown, particularly the higher-value knowledge-based industries. Their greater capacity to increase productivity, through knowledge and innovation, is anticipated to help the North Kent economy grow in the future.

- Productivity, as measured by GVA per head of population, has increased across North Kent, particularly in Dartford where it has outpaced regional and national growth.

- Residents in work in all four local authority areas have seen their average earnings increase by more than that experienced across Kent or the UK.

- Although the proportion of residents employed in Managerial and Professional occupations remains low in North Kent, there has been an increase in those in Associate Professional and Technical occupations and a decrease in those in the lowest-skilled occupations.

- Workers with high-level skills or qualified to degree level remain under-represented in North Kent, but these numbers are increasing proportionately faster than regionally and nationally, suggesting that the gap is closing.

- North Kent has seen the rate of business start-ups increase more than the regional or national average.
Thames Gateway Kent: key investment opportunities
Key investment opportunities

Being part of the wider Thames Gateway, North Kent presents huge opportunities to local businesses and investors. Unlocking these opportunities through the development of key sites is already underway, with some being taken forward by the private sector and others expecting some level of public sector intervention. It will be through the development of these key sites that our targets for new jobs and new homes and economic growth will be delivered.

**Dartford Northern Gateway** - this mixed-use development will deliver up to 2,000 new homes, 1,200 new jobs and a range of supporting facilities, including a dedicated Fastrack rapid bus transit route.

**Dartford Town Centre** - up to 1,000 new homes and 300 new jobs are to be created in this town centre scheme, which includes the redevelopment of Dartford station.

**Ebbsfleet Valley** - comprises a 260 hectare site between Ebbsfleet International station and Bluewater, which has scope for up to 7,750 new homes, and a 150 hectare site which could deliver around 800,000m² of mixed-use development, including around 3,000 homes and commercial/retail development that could create up to 20,000 new jobs.

**Gravesend Town Centre** - over 1,000 new homes will be developed in and around Gravesend Town Centre, capitalising on the 22 minute high-speed train service direct to London.
Northfleet Embankment - comprises two sites totalling around 70 hectares on the eastern edge of Gravesend town centre close to Ebbsfleet International and has extensive river frontage with deep water access to the Thames.

The Lafarge-owned Northfleet Embankment West site has the potential to deliver around 500 houses and 1,500 new jobs through a mixed-use scheme, while the HCA-owned Northfleet Embankment East site is a potential location for commercial development, such as cruise liner facilities and wind energy manufacturing at Imperial Wharf.

Chatham Centre – 2,000 new homes and 2,700 new jobs will be created around the prospective world heritage site, and waterfront - in addition to significant retail and leisure opportunities.

Chatham Waters – still at planning stage, this major mixed-use proposal situated adjacent to Chatham Maritime, would see massive reinvestment in Chatham Docks - comprising more than 175,000m² of commercial and education space with potential to create 3,500 jobs.

Chatham Maritime – two development opportunities remain on this well established and prestigious development. St. Mary’s Island and the area between Chatham Maritime and the Chatham Historic Dockyard, will deliver a further 1,400 new homes and around 4,500m² of commercial space.

Rochester Riverside – this site has the benefit of outline planning permission and is ready for development. Phase 1a is underway and the site will ultimately accommodate 2,000 new homes and more than 45,000m² of mixed commercial space.

Rochester Airport - situated close to the M2 and including a major BAE Systems complex, this strategic location is to be developed as a technology and knowledge-based cluster. Rationalisation of the existing airport is planned, creating capacity for more than 45,000m² of high-quality commercial space.
Strood Centre – this extensive waterfront area extends from the M2, through Temple Waterfront and Strood town centre, to Strood Riverside adjoining Strood station. It includes a number of distinct mixed-use development opportunities that will be complemented by infrastructure improvements in the centre and the refurbishment of the station that already offers access to HS1 services. In total these opportunities are expected to result in over 2,000 new homes and around 2,800 new jobs.

Lodge Hill, Chattenden – this is the only proposed freestanding new settlement in the Thames Gateway, and occupies an exceptional site on the Hoo Peninsula. The first of around 5,000 homes and the same number of jobs are expected in 2014 - associated health, education, retail, hotel and other facilities are also planned.

Sittingbourne Town Centre - there are a number of developments proposed for the town centre. These include: the redevelopment of the Bell Centre Arcade (which is already underway); the Essential Land redevelopment of the 8 hectare Sittingbourne Mill site (for a mixed-use development including 150 homes and a new Morrison’s superstore); the town centre redevelopment proposed by the Spirit of Sittingbourne consortium; and proposals by Tesco for a major new superstore north of the town centre.

Queenborough and Rushenden - this site, located off the A249 on the Isle of Sheppey, will deliver up to 2,000 new homes within a historic existing community - alongside approximately 350,000m² of commercial space at Neats Court, which could create up to 4,600 jobs.

Port of Sheerness North Kent can become a major manufacturing hub for the offshore industry, with the potential to create 2,000 new jobs directly at the plant. Vestas has agreed a land options deal with Peel Ports at Sheerness Port, with a view to being operational by 2015. This forms part of the wider Medway Superhub concept - a major opportunity for development in the offshore wind energy industry.
We welcome your comments

We would like to hear what you think of our plans for Thames Gateway Kent, and what you would like us to do to help your business.

If you would like to get involved with the Partnership or to sign up to our regular newsletter, please contact us using the details below.

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We would like to thank the following partners for providing images for this booklet:
- Dartford Borough Council
- Gravesend Borough Council
- Historic Dockyard Chatham
- Kent County Council
- Locate in Kent
- Medway Council
- Medway Swale Estuary Partnership
- Swale Borough Council
- Visit Kent